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## ABSTRACT

Traditional assumptions about oral and written discourse persist among various philosophers and critics. Careful examination of the context for traditional assumptions, however, suggests that current scholarship should pursue altered lines of inquiry. Peculiar influences on Renaissance standards of purpose, style, and theme illustrate the nature of the problem, especially the works of Pietro Bembo, a Renaissance humanist chancellor and religious administrator. First, his forensic priorities in the principles and practice of rhetoric focused critical attention on a limited setting and purpose of discourse. Second, although written communications were customarily designed for oral proclamation, Renaissance developments in dialectic stressed the written word and promoted practical training in communicative skills outside rhetorical studies. Third, the reassessment of literary standards in response to emerging vernacular discourse stigmatized the spoken word as inherently less significant than the written word. Drawing on the Renaissance thought expounded by Pietro Bembo, scholars may avoid the frustration that all too frequently accompanies inquiry into oral and written discourse by disclaiming generic distinctions. Instead, scholars should examine practical differences in purpose rather than distinctions in theme, as well as the potential sequential relationship of writing and speech rather than isolated mechanics of style. (HOD)

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PIETRO BEMBO AND STANDARDS FOR ORAL AND WRITTEN  
DISCOURSE: THE FORENSIC, DIALECTICAL, AND  
VERNACULAR INFLUENCES ON RENAISSANCE THOUGHT

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **PIETRO BEMBO AND STANDARDS FOR ORAL AND WRITTEN DISCOURSE: THE FORENSIC, DIALECTICAL, AND VERNACULAR INFLUENCES ON RENAISSANCE THOUGHT**

The proper distinction between speech and writing remains a difficult question. Renaissance answers to the question are particularly significant because of their pivotal position in the history of ideas, yet these answers have not been reported specifically. This essay reports three influences on Renaissance consideration of the distinction between oral and written discourse--particularly in the representative works of Pietro Bembo (1470-1547). These three influences suggest critical standards for continued scrutiny. More specifically, the forensic, dialectical, and vernacular priorities of the Renaissance indicate necessary adjustments in contemporary statements of the problem.

PIETRO BEMBO AND STANDARDS FOR ORAL AND WRITTEN  
DISCOURSE: THE FORENSIC, DIALECTICAL, AND  
VERNACULAR INFLUENCES ON RENAISSANCE THOUGHT.

Research into the differences between speech and writing generally reflects traditional assumptions derived from classical sources. These sources understandably do not address contemporary settings of communication, yet traditional standards for oral and written discourse persist. Because of the mediatory role played by Renaissance scholars and critics, greater recognition of the Renaissance adjustments in discursive standards would enhance contemporary scrutiny of the relationship between spoken and written words.

The assumption that oral and written discourse differ in significant ways has attracted scholarly attention since antiquity. Although Aristotle's Rhetoric is often cited to illustrate early attention to the distinction between oratory and literature,<sup>1</sup> ancient inquiry may profitably be traced in other equally instructive works.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's On Interpretation, for example, pointedly asserts the more direct signification of thought in spoken words than in writing.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Plato questioned whether the writing of words permits more extensive and accurate expression of inner thoughts than speech.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars continue to puzzle over the distinct features which oral and written discourse should possess. Public speaking texts, for example, typically assert that oral style should be more direct and concrete than the passive voice and abstract expression permissible in writing. At the same time, however, editors typically encourage authors to use the active voice and sensate imagery. Examining the traditional standard that a necessary distinction exists,<sup>5</sup> recent research concludes that common variations in the

elements of human communication (type of message, environment; etc.) make generalizations about oral and written discourse difficult.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the relatively slight degree of difference between oral and written style may support the investigation of other, more significant linguistic dimensions.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps research into the inherent meaningfulness of orality itself would produce more satisfying conclusions than continued attempts to isolate differences between orations and essays.<sup>8</sup>

My purpose here is to identify the type and scope of Renaissance inquiry which adjusted traditional standards for oral and written discourse. I initially describe the Renaissance crucible in which ancient assumptions were tested and reformulated for modern use. Then, after explaining the demonstrably significant contribution made by Pietro Bembo (1470-1547), a courtier, author, and prince of the Church, I examine the major influences on Bembo's principles and practice of eloquence. Ultimately I argue that three contextual influences--forensic priorities in the rhetoric highly esteemed by humanists of Bembo's era, Renaissance developments in dialectic, and practical concerns over vernacular literature--shaped the questions asked about oral and written discourse. Furthermore, recent inquiries have relied on standards unwarranted by the central issue. More specifically, standards of length, style, and proper subject matter require contemporary reappraisal.

### The Value of Renaissance Inquiry

The significance of Renaissance thought lies in the humanism of the period. In effect, the studies, disquisitions, and publications of Renaissance humanists invigorated ancient arts and sciences. Through their discussion of "well-selected and mellowed classical wisdom,"<sup>9</sup> the humanists outlined issues and methods of inquiry for more systematic treatment by

later scholars. The accomplishments of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), for example, may be judged as collectively diffuse--though individually stunning--unless the critic considers Leonardo's ingenious translation of ancient hypotheses for modern development. Although he primarily has attracted notice for his artistic achievements, Leonardo's Notes illustrate how Renaissance inquiry has served the modern world: extending the anatomical investigations of Herophilus and Erasistratus (both third century B.C.) and of Galen (A.D. 129-199), Leonardo's sketches of the human circulatory system benefitted William Harvey and later physicians. Similarly well known is the heliocentric perspective of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)--a substantial refinement of ancient observations by Aristarchus (third century B.C.). Galileo's influence, however, on Isaac Newton's first two laws of gravity and on the science of mathematics in general is not widely recognized.

Renaissance humanism was a particularly active phase in the historical enterprise known as the rhetorical tradition.<sup>10</sup> The humanist preoccupation with achieving the classical ideal of conjoined wisdom and eloquence translated this desire to modern communicative arts and sciences. Beginning with the philological inquiries of Gasparino of Barzizza (ca. 1359-1431) and Antonio Loschi (1365-1441), and culminating in fully developed rhetorics across Europe,<sup>11</sup> the humanists pursued every nuance of human expression. Consequently, humanists not only addressed rhetorical standards in classical oratory and literature but also examined the more modern media of vernacular discourse. Here the inquiry was spurred on by the medieval examples set by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375).<sup>12</sup>

Equally significant developments in Renaissance dialectic modified outlooks on the efficacy of rhetoric and, by extension, the standards for oral

and written discourse. Questioning traditional standards, authors such as Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540), and Phillip Melancthon (1497-1560) promoted the subordination of rhetoric to dialectic in the education of "orators".<sup>13</sup> In this reform, precepts of Cicero and Quintilian were used to support dialectic as a format for practical discourse and not merely the formal demonstration associated with Scholastic logic. The doctrine of Pierre de la Ramée (Peter Ramus, 1515-1572) exerted perhaps the greatest influence on late Renaissance and early modern educational methods.<sup>14</sup> The Ramist regime excluded all but stylistic and presentational skills from the rhetorical curriculum; training in dialectic promoted the written word rather than speechmaking.<sup>15</sup> Depending on which authors were consulted, therefore, the closely reasoned argument and spare style of dialectic would impress students as being apt for both oral and written discourse.

As more of the institutions which we would now recognize as integral to society emerged during the Renaissance, the quantity and quality of speechmaking increased.<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, the prominence of spoken discourse in promoting and modifying social, political, religious, and economic establishments attracted critical inquiry from concerned professionals including "jurists, physicians, mathematicians, philosophers, and theologians."<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the extensions of rhetoric throughout the era can be seen in both literary and oratorical applications. For example, although the formal letter began to overtake the oration as an official mode of communication during the fifteenth century, most letters were read aloud to their recipients, literate and illiterate alike. This practice, of course, followed the oral traditions of antiquity. The distinction between oral and written discourse, then, was somewhat blurred for Renaissance professionals.<sup>18</sup> The careers of notable pragmatists such as Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) readily illustrate the influence of rhetorical lore on both academic and applied enterprises through two centuries.<sup>19</sup> Machiavelli composed a history of his native Florence that contained "speeches" no less persuasive in design than actual orations delivered in the Florentine council; Bacon's argumentation in his Advancement of Learning paralleled his oratorical technique in serving the Crown as Solicitor General and Attorney General.

Taking into account peculiarly humanist contributions, the Renaissance may be seen accurately as a period of discovery rather than invention.<sup>20</sup> Immersing themselves in classical lore, some humanists reveled in whatever ancient knowledge could be recovered (indeed, many a umanista was perfectly content to meditate on pearls of wisdom from antiquity whether or not practical applications were conceivable). Another class of humanist attempted translations of classical learning not only for easier comprehension but also for everyday utility. Fortunately for the theory and practice of rhetoric, both classes addressed standards of public discourse. The forensic context of highly regarded classical works on rhetoric, however, the continuing friction between principles of eloquence (i.e., "rhetoric") and precepts of dialectic (i.e., "philosophy"), and developments in vernacular composition channeled humane energies in peculiar directions when addressing the distinction between speech and writing. Because of the chronological scope and thematic diversity of relevant commentaries, representative works of Pietro Bembo may be consulted in summarizing humanist thought.

#### The Stature of Pietro Bembo

The typical humanist was liberally educated and made professional use of his or her learning,<sup>21</sup> though perhaps never admitting to practical applications. Pietro Bembo's father, Bernardo, served Venice as ambassador



to the papal court, provincial governor, and counsellor, introducing his son to the full range of Renaissance educational opportunities.<sup>22</sup> Pietro received an "elaborate" education at Florence, Messina, and Padua, representing "the perfect example of the elegant and witty scholar, who regarded his learning as an accomplishment to be used for pleasure and advancement."<sup>23</sup> A student of the famed Greek scholar, Janos Lascaris, Bembo also edited Latin and Italian works for Aldo Manuzio in Venice before becoming a courtier at Urbino from 1506-1512. In fact, Castiglione's Renaissance handbook on proper political conduct (The Courtier) is set at the Duke of Urbino's court in March, 1507, and features Bembo as one of the dialogists.<sup>24</sup> With poetic justice, Bembo successfully used his position at Urbino as a stepping stone to both political and literary achievements.

Selected by Leo X as secretary of the papal briefs in 1512, Bembo assumed duties which could only be executed properly through the effective composition of Latin letters. Indeed, Bembo wrote at least twenty-four papal briefs to the King of France between 1515 and 1521.<sup>25</sup> As an active member of the papal entourage, Bembo's skill at speechmaking also was put to the test at court and in diplomatic missions to Venice and other states. He grew impatient with the pace of his advancement, however, and left the Pope's service to enter the religious order of Jerusalemites at Padua. While awaiting the benefits to be derived from his new career,<sup>26</sup> he not only fathered several children but also produced a seminal dialogue On the Vernacular Tongue which he presented to Pope Clement VII in 1524 and published the following year at Venice. Combined with the 1530 publication of his polemic On Imitation (a pamphlet written in 1512 which opposed the views of Gianfrancesco Pico on Ciceronian style), Bembo's works demonstrated his familiarity with leading issues in criticism. Although he experienced

lingering dissatisfaction with his career,<sup>27</sup> he achieved fame through the multiple editions of his letters and poetry as well as his Latin and vernacular editions of the History of Venice.

Bembo's reputation was impressive enough to merit his lionization by Gabriel Harvey as one of the most "elegant and refined" Italian orators of the era.<sup>28</sup> Continuing scholarship on Renaissance rhetoric not only explains the "treasure trove" of Renaissance inquiries into human communication,<sup>29</sup> but also sustains Pietro Bembo's stature. On the one hand, Bembo's position at Rome afforded him a unique opportunity to observe and analyze the latest developments in oratory at the papal court.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Bembo's innovative rhetoric of letter-writing drew attacks from noted humanists such as Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533-1592) who opposed Bembo's personal, pragmatic applications of discursive skill.<sup>31</sup> In short, Bembo attracted substantial praise and blame in his own time and continues to attract critical attention as a significant contributor to the history of rhetoric.

Remarkable in several respects, Pietro Bembo provided an especially significant commentary on the standards for oral and written discourse. Scholars may look to the previous century, for example, and admire discussions of the same issue by Leonardo Bruni (ca. 1374-1444). In sum, Bruni felt that the memorialization of thought in writing should be reserved for "high matters" while everyday speech remained flexible enough to accommodate diverse subjects.<sup>32</sup> Both "writing and conversation", however, could be similarly improved by studying the expression, emotional appeals, and vocabulary of ancient orators.<sup>33</sup> Unlike Bembo, Bruni delivered his sentiments within discussions of the philosophical dimension of rhetoric. For Bruni, the form of expression was intimately linked to content--especially in expressing complex or interrelated ideas. Both Bruni and Bembo, though, drew

inspiration for their views from the same sources, notably Quintilian.<sup>34</sup>

Renaissance developments after Bembo may be characterized as elocutionary. Following the massive educational influence of Peter Ramus, studies in rhetoric were often categorically limited to style and delivery. Rhetoricians such as Henry Peacham specialized in cataloguing figures of speech (The Garden of Eloquence, 1593). On the other hand, authors such as George Puttenham (ca. 1520-1601) discussed the stylistic distinction between oral and written discourse in a manner relevant to the concerns of humanists like Bembo. Puttenham distinguished figures which appealed to the ear ("auricular") from those appealing to the mind ("sensible"), as well as a third class of figures which possessed both sensate and intellectual appeals.<sup>35</sup> Puttenham thus claimed that tactical adjustments in oral style could enhance argument in the same way as changes in written style. For example, the illustrative force of oral and written comparisons and examples is the same, that is, these "sententious" figures both please the ear and support argumentation.<sup>36</sup>

A humanist chancellor and religious administrator such as Pietro Bembo pragmatically valued effective rhetoric whether in orations or in letters. Bembo's academic and professional achievements also stimulated critical inquiry by others into the discursive standards relevant to his own pragmatic concerns.

### Standards of Public Discourse

#### Forensic Influences

The principles and practice of legal communication influenced Renaissance standards to the extent that humanists customarily thought of rhetoric with forensic connotations. In academic terms, humanists revered classical

rhetoricians such as Cicero and Quintilian who addressed forensic priorities in their works. Consequently, Renaissance rhetorics often sustained the forensic perspectives of classical models. In practical terms, professional duties drew humanist attention to forensic rhetoric. The most renowned center of legal education was located at Bologna, a cradle of Italian humanism. The clerical duties of humanists required expert legal advice to deliberative assemblies and precise drafting of official documents.

Pietro Bembo's education introduced him to rhetorical precepts which had been approved by classical lawyers and their Renaissance admirers. A native of Venice, Bembo came from a city long admired for the diplomatic training it provided:<sup>37</sup> the common title of an envoy, oratore, indicates clearly "the public importance attached to rhetoric."<sup>38</sup> Somewhat less evident perhaps is the public subsidy of education at Venice so that the city's chancery would be supplied with trained notaries (a position equivalent to the contemporary legal bureaus attached to legislative assemblies).<sup>39</sup> His formal training at Florence placed Bembo near an outstanding repository of classical works on rhetoric. Traditionally, "Cicero's rhetorical works and the Declamations ascribed to Quintilian were especially conspicuous" in Renaissance libraries;<sup>40</sup> in Florence, Bembo had access to sixteen copies of various works on rhetoric and oratory by Cicero as well as several copies of Quintilian's works--including the spurious forensic declamations and the more genuine Institutio Oratoria.<sup>41</sup> The forensic applications of rhetoric would have been all the more attractive to Bembo during his later education at Padua while the noted scholar; Lauro Quirino, drew forty ducats at Padua for teaching rhetoric, lawyers drew 1000 ducats for their professional instruction.<sup>42</sup>

humanists generally consulted Quintilian's Institutes for the rules of

rhetoric while seeking models in Cicero's orations. After the early fifteenth-century rediscovery of integral copies of works by Cicero and Quintilian, classical rules and models became all the more accessible. In fact, Bembo remarked that he did not develop a "model of style" or "image of speaking" until after he had consulted classical authors.<sup>43</sup> When reading Quintilian's rules, for example, Bembo found that the technique of rhetoric was related principally to forensic declamations. Classical declamations, of course, were customarily written for inspection by the teacher before oral delivery by the student. The rules of rhetoric, therefore, served "accusers" and "defenders",<sup>44</sup> whether these advocates were merely students or practitioners of the law.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the finest examples of rhetoric were evident in forensic orations by Cicero.<sup>46</sup> Cicero himself explained (through the character of Crassus) that his rhetorical doctrine included what he had learned through pleading cases.<sup>47</sup>

When consulting Renaissance admirers of Cicero and Quintilian, Bembo found parallel doctrines. In his major work on rhetorical elegance, for example, Lorenzo Valla (ca. 1407-1457) defined orator as a pleader of cases and declamator as a student who pleads fictitious cases.<sup>48</sup> Along with his cousin, and with equally famous rhetoricians like George of Trebizond, Giorgio Valla stressed style when explaining the art of rhetoric. When discussing argument as well as style, though, Giorgio Valla referred principally to forensic applications (de iudiciali genere).<sup>49</sup> Even the Rhetoric composed in Poland by Filippo Buonaccorsi, an Italian exile called Callimachus Experiens ("the enterprising one"), reflected the predominant emphasis on legal rhetoric found in the works of less peregrine humanists: ninety percent of Buonaccorsi's work expounds forensic technique.<sup>50</sup>

The significance for Bembo of forensic priorities is relatively simple

to identify but more difficult to explain. Then as now, lawyers prized the winning of cases above other concerns. In the same sense, classical rhetoricians had grappled with the question of which standard was most accurately related to rhetorical effectiveness; Cicero ultimately conceded that winning the applause of the majority of listeners (or, jurors) was as good a guide to effectiveness as any.<sup>51</sup> Taking rhetorical lore to heart, Bembo partially distinguished between standards for oral and written discourse on the basis of "winning" audiences. In the first place, those who lack "a natural "faculty" or who are "inept" at rhetorical efforts should not attempt the art; Bembo addressed himself only to those "who can accomplish something with concentration and hard work", that is, to those "whose genius, if cultivated, will bear rich and great fruits."<sup>52</sup> These likely speakers and writers, therefore, should recognize the standards of effectiveness as demonstrated by Cicero's legal oratory, remembering that "some (oratorical) techniques, which may seem superfluous when being read, may have been judged to be necessary at the time of their delivery."<sup>53</sup> In this regard, Bembo pointed out that Cicero seems verbose (especially when discussing his own merits) but that this prolixity may have been essential to winning the case at hand. Rhetorically establishing one's credibility as an advocate, for example, may demand original oral development which would appear excessive on later reading of a printed version. The relative length and looseness of oral discourse, therefore, may be called a flaw (orationis vitium) when compared to written discourse.<sup>54</sup> Yet, in an admirable manner, speakers may wish to clarify exhaustively their opinions "so that they can modify their position through the correction of others or confirm their position through the approval of others."<sup>55</sup>

Normative differences in length and the use of repetition persist in

teaching and research on oral and written discourse. Renaissance humanists, however, citing their classical references and professional concerns, judged prolix rhetoric appropriate for forensic applications. Unlike policy-makers, preachers,<sup>56</sup> and other public speakers, advocates typically explain their sides of cases to several immediate audiences--judges, jurors, opposing counsel, court reporters, and others. The multiplicity of audiences requires a lengthy, repetitive mode of discourse. Moreover, the alternative approaches to prosecution or defense in a given case dictate several restatements of the principal issues germane to each line of argument. When Pietro Bembo cautioned the readers of orations against facile criticisms of verbosity, therefore, he was referring to forensic settings and allied standards for discourse.

### Dialectical Influences

Prominent reforms in Renaissance dialectic led to widespread disapproval of traditionally rhetorical standards for oral and written discourse. Although later reformers like Ramus claimed the study of disposition and argument for the dialectical curriculum, the restricted elocutionary training reserved for rhetorical studies nonetheless promoted expository and persuasive skills which rested firmly on classical authority. Cicero, for example, had Crassus promise to explain the true principles of oratory only within his own "knowledge and power":<sup>57</sup> this mitigating formula was drawn from the Roman law of inheritance and demonstrated the influence reserved for tactical choices in diction (in the case of Crassus, a delineation of limits on instructional liability). Quintilian also indicated the relative influence reserved for stylistic tactics: providing critical guidelines for Renaissance cataloguers like George Puttenham, Quintilian distinguished



figures of speech (figurae verborum) from figures of thought (figurae sententiae) while also recognizing the "generally shared features" of these figures.<sup>58</sup> In effect, the later Renaissance development of a dialectical rhetoric promoted manuscript speaking in which the most thoughtful invention and elocution could be blended. The written word tended to replace extemporaneous speaking, but letters and other writings were nevertheless proclaimed in a ritualistic celebration of communication.

Following Cicero's precept that writing is the best preparation for speaking--as long as the spoken word is adapted to theme and situation<sup>59</sup>--Pietro Bembo criticized Renaissance speech preparation. For Bembo, speech was an obvious clue to personal breeding because the spoken word displayed taste in the same fashion as choice of garments.<sup>60</sup> From Bembo's perspective, sixteenth-century Italy abounded with tasteless speakers. The solution to the problem lay in closer attention to the relationship between virtue and literacy (la virtù e le buone lettere).<sup>61</sup> Perhaps the later proponents of dialectical rhetoric accurately perceived a decline in that pointed quality of oratory which engages listeners' attention. Perhaps the lack of craftsmanship in orations which were customarily committed to writing supported the dialecticians demand for improved training. In any event, Bembo responded to the situation with writing which readily accommodated proclamation.

Bembo's exemplary Latin correspondence with his student, Longolius, addresses the theme of eloquence while also demonstrating the tactical use of rhetorical devices: "Are you in a hurry? Why? Are you beginning to feel ill? I really prefer, my Longolius, that you would slowly reach that harbor of eloquence which you seek after a leisurely voyage, rather than sailing so swiftly that you would be thrown overboard by a gust of wind."<sup>62</sup> First, Bembo stressed that achieving eloquence requires a rather lengthy period of



study--a longer period than later dialectitians would admit. This course of study would include attention to both argument and style as well as an extended observation of both masterful speakers and outstanding writers. Only in this manner would an aspiring rhetor appreciate the sources and power of discourse. Second, Bembo demonstrated the discursive tactics which make prose style amenable to proclamation. His rhetorical questions and sustained imagery are as appropriate for speaking as for writing. Although the standards of classical Latin influenced Bembo's form of expression, the technical devices and imagery in his letter could be cultivated in any language.

The combined effect of humanist regard for classical elocution and the educational reforms of Renaissance dialectitians prompted Pietro Bembo to examine the oral applications for tactics of prose style. The customary oral recitation of formal letters, for instance, demanded written discourse which was adaptable for proclamation. Consequently, normative distinctions between oral and written style were alien to both academic and applied interests. The current persistence of normative distinctions, however, lacks Renaissance contextual pressures to isolate elocution as the proper focus of rhetorical studies. On the contrary, the contemporary denigration of flawed discourse as "mere rhetoric" encourages the study of substantive aids to speech rather than formal devices. Continued attention, therefore, to differences between oral and written style may frustrate progress in comprehending shared needs for spoken and written efficacy. Examining the potentially valuable sequence of styles, that is, determining whether writing should be preliminary to effective speech, suggests greater rewards.

### Vernacular Influences

While forensic and dialectical influences drew attention to the setting

and form of discourse, concern over the growth of vernacular expression directed Renaissance attention to thematic standards for speech and writing. Unlike the ancient socio-political distinction between Greek and Latin (in which Roman authors typically denigrated their counterparts at Athens or Rhodes as "greeklings") and unlike the more recent educational questions raised by support for minority dialects, Renaissance debate over the vernacular fundamentally challenged the commission of certain speech to writing. The debate assumed considerable importance because humanists believed "language to be the best vehicle of true culture."<sup>63</sup> Coupled with the belief that speaking, not writing, channels the development of language,<sup>64</sup> the emergence of vernacular literature forced humanists to examine whether their carefully nurtured renaissance would survive. Latinists ruled against vernacular development; other humanists addressed the problem by promoting the elevation of vernacular expression to classical heights of achievement.

Pietro Bembo composed a prominent defense of vernacular literature in his dialogue On the Vernacular Tongue (Prose della lingua volgare).<sup>65</sup> As a highly respected Latinist, Bembo's position was uniquely influential. Moreover, the circulation in manuscript of Bembo's dialogue as early as 1502 predated significant vernacular works by Sannazzaro, Machiavelli, and Ariosto, possibly influencing the composition of these works as well. Bembo organized his dialogue in three parts with the argument related to oral and written rhetorical norms appearing principally in Book One. Book Two distinguishes between "good" and "popular" tastes, while Book Three explains standards of grammar. Of the four characters participating in the dialogue, only Ercole Struzza opposes the vernacular as internally consistent, complete, and effective expression (organica, perfetta, efficiente).<sup>66</sup> Bembo portrayed his brother, Carlo, as supporting the vernacular. Other supportive dialogists

include Giuliano de'Medici and Federico Fregoso.

Ercole Strozza initially states the position which Bembo wished to refute. According to Strozza, the vernacular is historically the language of "common" conversation and, therefore, should not be dignified by committing it to writing.<sup>67</sup> On the other side, Giuliano de'Medici contends that the vernacular is not merely a "common" but a "natural" and "proper" medium.<sup>68</sup> Although Ferderico Fregoso offers an alternative proposal--that the acceptable vernacular would resemble the courtly language spoken commonly at Rome--the standards of naturalness and propriety set forth by Giuliano de'Medici remain more significant for inquiry into oral and written discourse. In fact, the two standards illuminate Renaissance thought as a corridor from classical to modern values. In Bembo's dialogue, the classical dedication to propriety (i.e., "the golden mean") is juxtaposed with the Romantic idealization of nature. The issue at hand, then, was whether the damning indictment of vernacular (or, spoken) language as "common" could be mitigated or completely refuted by defining it as "natural". A comparison with related decision-making in the late twentieth century clarifies the significance of the debate: a decision in favor of either extreme at present would canonize respectively either "the King's English" or "street talk" for both speechmaking and literary endeavors. Pietro Bembo eluded the horns of the dilemma in the position expounded by his brother.

Carlo Bembo offers a sensible set of standards to resolve the controversy. Spoken vernacular, says Carlo, is not as meritorious as its written form because popular usage is never as elegant as literary usage.<sup>69</sup> Carefully crafted vernacular, on the other hand, may be acceptable because the standard to be satisfied is whether the discourse addresses wide-ranging or long-lasting concerns.<sup>70</sup> In other words, spoken language should not be committed

to writing until the needs of distant audiences are considered. Carlo Bembo clarifies the "needs" to be considered in Book Two of the dialogue: a vernacular speech should not be memorialized in writing because of the reputation (fama) of the speaker but because the thought (sentenza) of the oration is significant and effectively expressed in the common tongue.<sup>71</sup>

Utterly consistent with the earlier philosophical viewpoint of Bruni and the later stylistic doctrine of Puttenham, Carlo Bembo measures the worth of both speech and writing against the same standard of "sententious" thought or impact. Bembo thus addresses Strozza's concern over worthy content while responding affirmatively to the other dialogists' vernacular preferences. In a larger sense, Bembo addresses the conservative standard of Latinists as well as the liberal attitude of vernacularists. In that vernacular content and style were perceived as equivalent to spoken matter and form, Carlo's proposal also identifies the proper and natural distinction between oral and written discourse.

Disputes over vernacular language continue to occur irregularly and only in specialized contexts (for example, in regard to biblical translations) but Pietro Bembo's dialogue can be construed to provide relevant insights into a broader inquiry. For example, Bembo's examination of differences between speech and writing reflected the prevailing attitude that literature was superior to oratory because the written word was capable of reaching distant audiences. To merit written form, speech should effectively express thoughts of widespread importance. Renaissance humanists, of course, did not consider non-print media of mass communication as setting standards for discourse. Instead, speech was deemed less significant than writing because the written word could reach a wider audience. Consequently, the decision to write an oration turned on whether the speech would address a wide range of audiences.

The immediacy available in contemporary speech transactions through electronic media may have turned the tables on earlier standards, placing demands on writing which are allied with Renaissance standards for the vernacular. In that Renaissance vernacular standards scarcely addressed instantaneous world-wide communication, perhaps any distinction between speech and writing based on thematic worthiness no longer applies. Indeed, common concerns about life, liberty, and property transcend media. Moreover, flawed rhetoric no longer dies when its speaker's voice is stilled. The publication of a person's thought can be suspended and copies can be withdrawn from circulation, but the mass communication of a speech does not permit so simple a retraction. In the future, the spoken word may well outlast the written word and a speaker's choice of theme may become more crucial than the selection made by a writer.

### Summary

Traditional assumptions about oral and written discourse persist among varied philosophers and critics. I. A. Richards, for example, remarked that "[t]he two modes of utterance rarely agree."<sup>72</sup> Marshall McLuhan substantially agreed on "[t]he widely separate characters of the spoken and written words."<sup>73</sup> Careful examination of the context for traditional assumptions, however, suggests that current scholarship should pursue altered lines of inquiry. Peculiar influences on Renaissance standards of purpose, style, and theme-- standards derived from classical thought but bequeathed to modern minds-- illustrate the nature of the problem. Especially in regard to this inquiry, the works of Pietro Bembo declare Renaissance thought.

First, forensic priorities in the principles and practice of rhetoric focused critical attention on a limited setting and purpose of discourse. A written legal argument, for example, was outlined in a "brief" to be elaborated

orally. Legal process is similar today but such procedure scarcely dictates general standards of length for oral and written discourse. Second, although written communications were customarily designed for oral proclamation, Renaissance developments in dialectic stressed the written word and promoted practical training in communicative skills outside rhetorical studies. The legacy of equating rhetoric with elocution has thus impeded recognition of a potentially rewarding but inverted curriculum in communication studies. Third, the reassessment of literary standards in response to emerging vernacular discourse stigmatized the spoken word as inherently less significant than the written word. Contemporary scholars must question, however, whether great ideas are restricted to publication in print media and whether thematic distinctions between speech and writing remain viable.

In his Praise of Folly, Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1466-1536) denigrated rhetorical training by remarking that the "lengthy, carefully designed speech" of great rhetors was largely ineffectual.<sup>74</sup> Erasmus composed his criticism as a declamation and in the form of an encomium.<sup>75</sup> The formally oratorical conceit in Erasmus' tract underscores the Renaissance commingling of standards for oral and written discourse. Despite contemporary progress along other lines of inquiry, striking differences in empirical observation of speech and writing have failed to inspire clearly distinct methods for evaluating effective expression in each medium. Drawing on the Renaissance thought expounded by Pietro Bembo, scholars may avoid the frustration which all too frequently accompanies inquiry into this area by disclaiming generic distinctions. Instead, scholars should examine practical differences in purpose rather than hypothetical distinctions in theme, as well as the potentially sequential relationship of writing and speech rather than isolated mechanics of style in each medium.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For example, see James W. Gibson et al., "A Quantitative Examination of Differences and Similarities in Written and Spoken Messages," Speech Monographs, 33 (1966), 444. Professor Gibson and colleagues substantially affirmed earlier conclusions reached in Joseph A. DeVito, "Comprehension Factors in Oral and Written Discourse of Skilled Communicators," Speech Monographs, 32 (1965), 124-28, while citing Aristotle's assertion that stylistic differences exist between (written) composition and (spoken) controversy (Rhetoric, 3. 12. 1413b 1).

<sup>2</sup>See Hiram Caton, "Speech and Writing as Artifacts," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 2 (1969), 20-22.

<sup>3</sup>16a, 3-38.

<sup>4</sup>Phaedrus, 274b-278b.

<sup>5</sup>Charles H. Woolbert provided a focal point for contemporary research with his "Speaking and Writing - A Study of Differences," Quarterly Journal of Speech Education, 8 (1922), 271-85.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Richard H. Henneman, "Vision and Audition as Sensory Channels for Communication," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 38 (1952), 161.

<sup>7</sup>Jane Blankenship, "A Linguistic Analysis of Oral and Written Style," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 48 (1962), 422.

<sup>8</sup>Carroll C. Arnold, "Oral Rhetoric, Rhetoric, and Literature," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1 (1968), 194-95.

<sup>9</sup>Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought - The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 18.

<sup>10</sup>Kristeller, p. 11. Also see Hanna H. Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," Journal of the History of Ideas, 24 (1963), 497-514.



<sup>11</sup> Illustrative works include those by George of Trebizond (1395-ca. 1473) from the eastern Mediterranean, Filippo Buonaccorsi (1437-1496) in Poland, Giorgio Valla (1447-1499) in Italy, Guillaume Fichet (early 1430's-late 1480's) in France, and Lorenzo Traversagni (1422-1503) in England.

<sup>12</sup> The development of vernacular literature outside Italy seems to have been delayed by the relatively stronger tradition of Latin letters in other nations. See Remigio Sabbadini, Storia del Ciceronianismo (Turin: E. Loescher, 1885).

<sup>13</sup> James R. McNally, "Rector et Dux Populi: Italian Humanists and the Relationship between Rhetoric and Logic," Modern Philology, 67 (1969), 168-76. Also see the summary in George Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 207-13.

<sup>14</sup> The allied Rhetorica of Omer Talon (ca. 1510-1562) reflected the subordinate curricular position of rhetoric as seen by Ramus.

<sup>15</sup> See Walter J. Ong, Ramus, Method, and Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958).

<sup>16</sup> Kennedy, p. 197.

<sup>17</sup> Kristeller, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> Ronald Witt, "Medieval 'Ars Dictaminis' and the Beginnings of Humanism: A New Construction of the Problem," Renaissance Quarterly, 35 (1982), 6. Also see Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought and Its Sources, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 85-105.

<sup>19</sup> For recent and relevant research, see William E. Wiethoff, "A Machiavellian Paradigm for Diplomatic Communication," Journal of Politics, 43 (1981), 1090-1104, and Stephen H. Daniel, "Myth and the Grammar of Discovery in Francis Bacon," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 15 (1982), 219-38. Other examples



of this line of research are numerous and tend to reflect the estimate of rhetorical influence as "pervasive" explained in Vincent M. Bevilacqua, "Rhetoric and the Circle of Moral Studies: An Historiographical View," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55 (1959), 343-44. Related but more wide-ranging treatments may be found in Nancy S. Streuver, The Language of History in the Renaissance - Rhetoric and Historical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), and in Lisa Jardine, Francis Bacon - Discovery and the Art of Discourse (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974).

<sup>20</sup> Francis Bacon provides apt recognition in his contemporaneous distinction between the systematic recalling of previously elucidated knowledge ("discovery") and the scientific exploration of previously unimagined truths ("invention"). Depending on one's reading of the Advancement of Learning, Bacon's distinction preserves or subjugates the role of rhetorical training. For an interpretation favorable to the prestige of rhetoric, see Karl R. Wallace, Francis Bacon on Communication & Rhetoric (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1943), pp. 51-85. For the opposing point of view, see Jardine, pp. 76-108.

<sup>21</sup> Considering the properly expanded realm of women's studies it seems odd that more research has not already been conducted into the achievements of learned persons of the fifteenth century such as Baptista of Montefeltro and her daughters Costanza and Baptista, Nogarola of Verona and her daughters Isotta and Ginevra, Cecilia Gonzaga, and Ippolita Sforza. Worthy subjects of research from the sixteenth century are even more numerous.

<sup>22</sup> For a colorful but abbreviated biography see Florence A. Gragg, Latin Writings of the Italian Humanists (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. xviii.

<sup>23</sup> Carlo Dionisotti provides complete and clearly arranged biographical

details in his edition of Prose e Rime di Pietro Bembo (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1960), pp. 57-60. Mario E. Cosenza has compiled a less conveniently organized biography, but one which is written in English, in Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of the Italian Humanists and of the World of Classical Scholarship in Italy, 1300-1800, second rev. ed. (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1962), 1: 491-501.

<sup>24</sup>For greater detail in describing Bembo's political aspirations, see Cecil H. Clough, The Duchy of Urbino in the Renaissance (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), sections 16-17.

<sup>25</sup>Clough, sec. 16, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup>Bemboreadily discussed the practical rather than mystical purpose of his religious career: see, for example, his letter to Vincenzo Quirino, 10 December 1506, in Pietro Bembo - Prose Scelte, ed. Francesco Costero (Milan: Sonzogno, 1927), p. 286.

<sup>27</sup>Bembo failed to obtain every post he sought in the civil service of Venice before he pursued his religious career, and he was not raised to the rank of Cardinal until 1539--then receiving only a minor bishopric in Gubbio in 1541. See Cecil H. Clough, "Luigi da Porto and Pietro Bembo at the Court of Urbino," Archivo Veneto, series 5, 81 (1967), 82.

<sup>28</sup>Ciceronianus (London: Henry Binneman, 1577), p. 24.

<sup>29</sup>James J. Murphy, "One Thousand Neglected Authors: The Scope and Importance of Renaissance Rhetoric," in Renaissance Eloquence - Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), p. 26.

<sup>30</sup>John W. O'Malley, Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome - Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c. 1450-1521, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 3 (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1979), p. 36

<sup>31</sup>See Judith Rice Henderson, "Erasmus on the Art of Letter Writing," in Murphy, p. 336, and Marc Fumaroli, "Rhetoric, Politics, and Society: From Italian Ciceronianism to French Classicism," in Murphy, p. 264.

<sup>32</sup>See Bruni's letter to Antonius Grammaticus, uncertain date, in Epistolarum libri octo (Basel: Henricus Petrus, 1535), 8: 343.

<sup>33</sup>Letter to Nicolaus, uncertain date, in Epistolarum libri octo, 6: 253.

<sup>34</sup>The translations of several related essays have recently illuminated Bruni's sentiments. See Hanna-Barbara Gerl, "On the Philosophical Dimension of Rhetoric: The Theory of Ornatus in Leonardo Bruni," trans. John M. Krois, Philosophy and Rhetoric, 11 (1978), 178-190; Rainier Weiss, "The Humanist Rediscovery of Rhetoric as Philosophy: Giovanni Giovano Pontano's Aegidius," trans. Yvonne Mundy, Philosophy and Rhetoric, 13 (1980), 25-42; and Ernesto Grassi, "Italian Humanism and Heidegger's Thesis of the End of Philosophy," trans. John M. Krois, Philosophy and Rhetoric, 13 (1980), 79-98. Professor Grassi's Rhetoric as Philosophy - The Humanist Tradition (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1980) should also be consulted for its extended treatment of the subject.

<sup>35</sup>The Arte of English Poesie (London: Richard Field, 1589), p. 201.

<sup>36</sup>Puttenham, p. 252.

<sup>37</sup>Dominic A. LaRusso, "Rhetoric and Diplomatic Training in Venice, 1450-1590," Western Speech, 23 (1959), 69-74.

<sup>38</sup>John A. Symonds, The Revival of Learning, Renaissance in Italy, 7 (London: John Murray, 1929), p. 387.

<sup>39</sup>James Bruce Ross, "Venetian Schools and Teachers, Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century: A Survey and a Study of Giovanni Battista Egnazio," Renaissance Quarterly, 29 (1976), 521.

<sup>40</sup>Pearl Kibré, "The Intellectual Interests Reflected in Libraries of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," Journal of the History of Ideas, 7

(1946), 280. Also see the comprehensive discussion of Cicero and Quintilian in William Harrison Woodward, Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators, Classics in Education, 18 (New York: Columbia Univ., 1963).

<sup>41</sup> See Berthold L. Ullman and Philip A. Stadler, The Public Library of Renaissance Florence - Niccolò Niccoli, Cosimo de' Medici and the Library of San Marco, Medioevo e Umanesimo, 10 (Padova: Antenore, 1972), pp. 66-72.

<sup>42</sup> Symonds, p. 88.

<sup>43</sup> De Imitatione, 42, ed. Giorgio Santangelo (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1954). All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

<sup>44</sup> Institutio Oratoria, 6. 1. 9, H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960). All subsequent citations of works by Cicero and Quintilian refer to editions in the Loeb Classical Library.

<sup>45</sup> Institutio Oratoria, 7. 6. 1.

<sup>46</sup> For example, see Institutio Oratoria, 6. 1. 3, referring to Cicero's use of concluding enumeratio in his speech against Verres.

<sup>47</sup> De Oratore, 1. 2. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Elegantiae linguae latinae (Venice, 1476), 4: 267.

<sup>49</sup> De Rhetorica (Venice, 1501), 1: 3.

<sup>50</sup> Rhetorica, ed. Kazimierz Feliks Kumaniecki (Warsaw, 1950).

<sup>51</sup> See Cicero, Brutus, 50. 186-89.

<sup>52</sup> De Imitatione, 43-44.

<sup>53</sup> De Imitatione, 55.

<sup>54</sup> De Imitatione, 55.

<sup>55</sup> De Imitatione, 61. Bembo may have had in mind Cicero's admonition that orators should not only address those listeners who "necessarily" require satisfaction but also those audiences who judge orations "freely" beyond the issue at hand.

<sup>56</sup> Even the papal sermons in Bembo's own time, though necessarily grand

in their design, were required to be relatively brief. See O'Malley, pp. 18-20.

<sup>57</sup>De Oratore, 1. 22. 101.

<sup>58</sup>Institutio Oratoria, 9. 1. 3.

<sup>59</sup>De Oratore, 1. 33. 150. 1. 34. 155.

<sup>60</sup>Letter to Angelo Gabriel, 10 April 1528.

<sup>61</sup>Letter to his son, Torquato, 10 November 1538.

<sup>62</sup>Letter to Longolius, 13 September 1512, in Epistolae, ed. Frederick A. C. Grauff (Bern: Lipsius, 1837): "Festines autem? ut quid? incidas in aliquem morbum? Ego vero te, mi Longoli, malo tranquilla navigatione utentem, aliquando serius eum adipisci eloquentiae quasi portum, quem petis: quam propter nimiam ventorum vim iactura facta celerrime navigarre."

<sup>63</sup>Toivo Viljamaa, The Renaissance Reform of Latin Grammar, Turun Yliopiston Julkaisuja Annales, 8-142 (Turku, Finland: Turku University, 1976), p. 13.

<sup>64</sup>Viljamaa, pp. 30-34.

<sup>65</sup>Subsequent citations refer to pages in the edition by Mario Marti (Padova: Liviana Editrice, 1955).

<sup>66</sup>See the introduction to his edition by Marti, p. x.

<sup>67</sup>Prose, p.9.

<sup>68</sup>Prose, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup>By vernacular, Carlo Bembo means the Tuscan or Florentine dialect of Italian. Bembo's preference for the language of Florence parallels in some ways the current regard for standard American English over minority dialects or North Central American pronunciation over other regional customs. Prose, p. 33.

<sup>70</sup>Prose, pp. 37-42.

<sup>71</sup>Prose, p.53.

<sup>72</sup>The Philosophy of Rhetoric (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), preface.

<sup>73</sup>Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 82.

<sup>74</sup>Moriae Encomium Id Est Stultitiae Laus, ed. Clarence H. Miller, in Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1979), vol. 4, sec.3, line 72.

<sup>75</sup>Erasmus, preface, line 19.